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ABSTRACT

Role-taking skills of ethnic minority children were studied to determine the effect of conflict in the self-identification process on the ability to adopt the perspectives of another person. The subjects were Canadian Indian children around the age of eight for whom there was evidence of conflicting ethnic identification tendencies. These children were asked to attribute the desirability of uncles from four different ethnic groups to peers from their own and other ethnic groups. One peer from each of these categories spoke English and a second peer spoke a non-English language. It was found that, contrary to studies with Swiss, British, and American whites, these Indian children were able to take accurately the role of peers from both a liked and a disliked ethnic group. These results are discussed in terms of the conflicting pressures on ethnic minority children as they develop an awareness of their own ethnic affiliations, and the effects of such conflict on role-taking. A secondary aim of this study was to determine whether the attribution of preference to another was based on egocentric attitudes or on perceived similarity of peer and uncle. Multiple regression analyses indicated that neither of these factors contributed significantly to role-taking judgments. (Author/JM)

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Role Taking and Self-Identification

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Abstract

Role-taking skills of ethnic minority children were studied to determine the effect of conflict in the self-identification process on the ability to adopt the perspectives of another person. The subjects were Indian children around the age of eight for whom there was evidence of conflicting ethnic identification tendencies. These children were asked to attribute the desirability of uncles from four different ethnic groups to peers from their own ethnic group, to peers from a liked ethnic group, and to peers from a disliked ethnic group. One peer from each of these categories spoke English and a second peer spoke a non-English language. It was found that, contrary to studies with Swiss, British, and American Whites, these Indian children were able to accurately take the role of peers from both a liked and a disliked ethnic group. These results were discussed in terms of the conflicting pressures on ethnic minority children as they develop an awareness of their own ethnic affiliations, and the effects of such conflict on role taking. A secondary aim of this study was to determine whether the attribution of preference to another was based on egocentric attitudes or on perceived similarity of peer and uncle. The multiple regression analyses indicated that neither of these factors contributed significantly to role-taking judgements, but that weights were more in favour of the attitude factor when taking the role of a liked English peer and more in favour of the similarity factor when taking the role of a liked non-English or a disliked peer.

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Role Taking and Self-Identification

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The development of ethnic awareness has been linked to the development of role-taking skills by Piaget and Weil (1951). They and other cognitive developmentalists (e.g. Kohlberg, 1969; Lambert & Klineberg, 1967) propose that ethnocentricity in young children derives from their general cognitive egocentrism or inability to take another's perspective. According to these theorists, the development of a self-concept is a crucial factor in the development of perceptions of others. For example, Piaget and Weil (1951) proposed that a child must first broaden his own self-concept to include affiliations with his family and then larger regional or social institutions such as a town, a nation, and an ethno-linguistic group. Only after such characteristics are encorporated into the self-concept can the child learn to attribute analogous affiliations to members of other groups. The research supporting this point of view found that Swiss children were not able, until 11 years of age, to comprehend the relativity of national affiliation; that is, that a Frenchman would not be a foreigner in France but a Swiss would be.

In the present study, the ethnocentricity of ethnic minority children was investigated by looking at their ability to take the role of various ethnic and language persons. As previously mentioned, Swiss children apparently do not appreciate fully the relativity of national affiliations until late in middle childhood. A study of British children (Middleton, Tajfel, and Johnson, 1970) found that seven-year-olds were aware

that certain non-British nationals would prefer their own nation more than they would Britain. The nationals for whom they were able to role take accurately were ones that the children liked. Accurate role taking for a disliked national was not evidenced until 11 year of age. Thus, both cognitive and affective factors seem to be important in determining ethnocentricity as measured in this way.

These conclusions were extended in a study conducted by Aboud and Mitchell (1975) to role taking of different ethno-linguistic groups living within the same nation. The studies discussed by Brand, Ruiz, and Padilla (1974) suggest that ethnic categorization is begun at a very early age, but that its development is complicated by processes of self-identification and preference. As in the study by Middleton et al., preference did enhance accurate role taking in White American children with mean ages of 6 and 8. However, these children were unable to infer that a disliked ethnic group member would prefer someone from his own ethnic group. This inaccuracy seemed to stem more from poor cue utilization than from egocentrism, since white uncles were not seen as more desirable than any other group. In addition, the language spoken by the role person impeded accurate role taking especially when the role person was a member of the child's own ethnic group but spoke a non-English language. Thus dislike of an ethnic group and language incongruity were most influential in impeding accurate role taking in White children.

The present study explored the factor of self-identification by assessing the role-taking skills of children from a minority ethnic group. Previous

work with White and Indian children (Aboud, 1975) discovered that White children were able to identify their ethnic affiliation correctly at five years, but that the majority of five-year-old Indian children were still uncertain of their ethnic affiliation. By six years of age the Indian children had reached a 71% level of correct identification comparable to the White children. This same group of six-year-old Indian children formed part of the sample used in this study. There are many reasons for this late ethnic identification, perhaps centering on their minority status and consequent lack of social support for this group affiliation. One reason may simply be the lack of a concept of ethnicity: almost half of the five-year-old Indians stated that they were all or none of the five mentioned ethnicities. Another reason may be attitudinal, in that minority groups typically prefer members of the White majority (see also, Asher & Allen, 1969). These conflicting pressures which initially appear to lead to confusion may later develop into a fuller appreciation of different ethnic affiliations once the correct identification is adopted. The notion that conflict leads to improved role-taking skills has also been discussed by Flavell (1968). Theoretically, it is by way of conflicts and arguments with peers that a child becomes aware of other perspectives. It is conceivable that internal conflicts relating to group affiliation might have the same effect. Following this line of argument, it was expected that Indian children over the age of six might show greater awareness of a different ethnic member's perspective than did White children discussed previously.

A secondary purpose of the study was to determine whether ethnic role taking was based more on egocentric attitudes than on judgments of ethnic similarity. Both of these processes have been used to explain inaccurate role taking (Middleton, Tajfel & Johnson, 1970; Aboud & Mitchell, 1975). A test of these two interpretations was carried out by relating egocentric preferences and judgments of similarity to role-taking behaviour, in a multiple regression analysis.

Method

Subjects

The children were from grades 1, 2 and 3, at an Indian school on Vancouver Island. Thirty-two children were tested, 11 male and 21 female, ranging in age from 6.08 to 9.92 years with a mean age of 7.97 years. The children were tested by an Indian female, while a White female recorded the ratings made by the child.

Stimulus Materials

Stimulus persons were presented to the children in the form of photographs and tape recorded speech. The coloured photos represented individual members of four different ethnic groups: Canadian Indian, White, Oriental, and Black. For each ethnic group, there were photos of two young boys aged 6 - 9 years and of two male adults in their twenties, making 16 faces in all. They all posed with a neutral facial expression. Each photo was mounted in such a way that it could be stood up to face the subject.

Speech tape recordings were made to pair with the photos of the eight boys. Using the matched-guise technique (Lambert, 1967), four boys, one from each ethnic group, spoke first in English and then in an appropriate non-English language. The non-English languages selected were: a Saanich Indian dialect, French, Chinese, and Efik a Black African dialect, respectively. Thus, one Indian boy was paired with the Indian dialect, and the other Indian boy was paired with the recording of the same speaker using English. The message on the tape consisted of numbers from one to ten and a list of animals that the boy liked. A stereotyped neutral message was chosen in order to make the language, rather than its content, salient.

The children made their responses on rating scales which consisted of strips of cardboard marked at the side in increments of 1 cm up to the length of 60 cm. For most measures, the numerically low end of the scale was placed closest to the child. Three different coloured rating boards were used to enhance the subjects' perception of the different reactions required in the three tasks.

Procedure

The children, tested individually, were first questioned about their awareness of the ethnic affiliation of the sixteen stimulus persons. First the photos of one age group, and then the photos of the other age group, were arranged in a semi-circle facing the child. For all the subsequent tasks, the stimulus photos were arranged in this manner. Almost all children were able to point to the four representatives of each ethnic group correctly. Those who showed some initial confusion were told the correct labels, and subsequently asked again until they were certain.

Following this, the children's behaviour was measured in three different task situations using the three different coloured rating boards: 1) their attitude toward the peer stimulus persons, 2) their perceptions of similarity between themselves and the peer stimulus persons, and between several peer stimulus persons and the adult stimulus persons, and 3) their ability to take the role of two peer stimulus persons from their own ethnic group, two from their most liked ethnic group, and two from their most disliked ethnic group, one from each group speaking English and the other speaking a non-English language. The photos were used in all three tasks, but the tapes in only the third role-taking task.

1) Attitude ratings. A rating board introduced to the child as the "Liking board" was placed in front of him. Instructions for the use of this board conveyed to the child that things which he liked should be placed close to him on the board and things which he did not like as much should be placed farther away on the board. Each child was given a practice trial with drawings of a dog, a rabbit, and a snake. The tester validated these ratings verbally with the child to make sure that the relative placements matched the child's actual feelings. The child was then instructed to place the eight peer ethnic stimulus persons on the board to indicate his feelings toward them. A numerical score from 1 (like) to 60 (dislike) was thereby obtained for each ethnic peer. The average score for each ethnic group other than the child's own was used to determine the most liked and most disliked of the White, Chinese, and Black peer stimulus persons for the later role-taking task.

2) Similarity ratings. Another 60 cm rating board was used to assess how similar the child perceived the peer stimulus persons to be to himself, and how similar he perceived the adult stimulus persons to be to the most liked and the most disliked peers. That is, judgments of similarity to himself were made using the peer photos, and judgments of similarity to the peers were made using the adult photos. For the self-similarity ratings the numerically low end of the board was closest to the child, and he was instructed to place closest to himself those boys who were most like him, and to place farther away the boys who were different from him. For the other-similarity ratings, the same board was turned sideways (to differentiate these ratings from the later role-taking ratings). Four peer stimulus persons were chosen, two from the child's most liked ethnic group and two from his most disliked ethnic group. One at a time these photos wereplaced at the numerically low end of the board, and the child was asked to arrange the eight adult stimulus persons on the board, close to the peer if they were similar and farther away if they were different. For each of these ratings a numerical score was obtained ranging from 1 (similar) to 60 (different).

The other-similarity ratings were introduced to explore the issue of whether egocentrism or poor cue utilization was the source of inaccurate role taking. Aboud and Mitchell (1975) were unable to explain inaccurate role taking of a disliked group in terms of egocentrism. Instead it seemed that the disliked group was perceived in a simple "different from me" fashion, so that any "different-from-me" uncle would be adequate. This suggests an inability to differentiate perceptually. In the present study,

this factor was investigated by measuring perceptions of similarity.

3) Role-taking task. The third rating board identified as the "Uncle board" was placed in front of the child. One at a time, the child was required to take the role of six role persons. These role persons consisted of the two peer stimulus persons from the child's own ethnic group (Indian), two peer stimulus persons from the child's most liked ethnic group, and two peer stimulus persons from the child's most disliked ethnic group. One role person from each ethnic group spoke English and the other spoke a non-English language. The photo-language pairing was systematically varied so that for half of the children Representative One from each ethnic group spoke English and for the other half Representative Two spoke English. English speaking roles were always taken before non-English speaking roles, and own ethnic roles were always taken before other ethnic roles, but the order of the other ethnic roles was randomized.

The instructions for this task were to place each of the adult stimulus persons on the board in the way that the role person would if he were indicating his preferences for an uncle. All children confirmed that they understood the meaning of uncle. The photo of the role person was placed at the front of the board, between the child and the numerically low end of the rating scale. The child was instructed to place close to him the adult stimulus persons who would be liked by the role person and to place farther along the board adults who would not be liked by him.

A variation of the procedure was introduced for half of the children. These children were asked to make uncle preference ratings for themselves before doing the role-taking task. The other children indicated their own

uncle preferences after role taking. This variation was introduced for purposes not related to this study, and it was expected that such a procedural modification would not make the children more or less egocentric.

Results

Behaviour on the role taking task was of primary concern in this study. These results were analyzed first in terms of an analysis of variance, and second in terms of a multiple regression analysis using attitudes and similarity ratings as independent variables. Analyses were first performed to see whether the role taking scores of children who had one set of photo-language pairs differed from those who had the other set of photo-language pairs, and to see whether children who made their own uncle preferences first differed from those who made their own uncle preferences later. No significant differences were found between these groups, so they were subsequently combined.

The uncle placements for the six different roles were subjected to a four-way repeated measures analysis of variance. Ethnicity, per se, of the role person was not a factor; rather role persons were categorized in terms of the likability of their ethnic group. Since role taking was studied in terms of matching a role person with a similar ethnic uncle, the ethnicity of the uncles was translated into the same categories of likability of ethnic group. Therefore, the four factors included in this analysis were: 1) likability of the role person's ethnic group (own ethnic group, most liked ethnic group, most disliked ethnic group), 2) language spoken by the role person (English or Non-English), 3) likability of the uncle's ethnic group

(own ethnic group, most liked ethnic group, middle liked ethnic group, and most disliked ethnic group), and 4) the two representative uncles from each ethnic group. Since previous research (Aboud & Mitchell, 1975) had indicated no significant differences in role taking between first and third grade students, all grades were combined. A frequency count revealed that for the most liked ethnic role, 15 children used White peers, 12 used Chinese peers, and 5 used Black peers. For the most disliked ethnic role, 5 used White peers, 6 used Chinese peers, and 21 used Black peers.

The results of this analysis showed a main effect for the ethnicity of the uncles, $\underline{F}$ (3,93) = 19.24 p <.01; and an interaction involving the ethnicity of the role person and the ethnicity of the uncles, $\underline{F}$ (6,186) = 26.68, p <.01. No main effects or intereactions were found involving either the language spoken by the role person or the two representative uncles from each ethnic group.

The interaction between ethnicity of role person and ethnicity of uncle revealed the degree to which role taking was accurate for the three levels of affect. Table 1 presents uncle ratings for these three role groups in comparison with the child's own uncle preference. Newman-Keuls comparisons were performed on each of the four sets of ratings. For all four sets, the uncles similar to the ethnic role were placed significantly closer than were uncles from the other three ethnic groups. This demonstrates accurate role taking. Placement of the uncles from the three non-similar ethnic groups is also interesting. When rating their own preferences, the children discriminated significantly between the most liked and the other two non-similar ethnic groups. When taking another's role, this degree of

differentiation was not made. In the own and most liked roles, uncles from all three non-similar groups were clustered together around the mid-point. When taking the disliked role, there was slightly more differentiation in that own ethnicity uncles were placed closer than middle liked ethnicity uncles.

Insert Table 1 about here

Although there was no evidence of inaccurate role taking, the issue of whether egocentric preferences or perceptions of similarity contributed more to role taking was checked. (also see added Table) Multiple regression analyses were performed to determine the extent to which the uncle preferences of a role person were related to the child's own uncle preferences and to the perceived similarity of the uncle to the role person. Eight analyses were performed using the placements of each of the eight uncles on these three rating tasks. Therefore, eight multiple regressions were done for each of the two liked and two disliked role persons. For example, for the liked English role, three ratings made on Representative One of the own ethnic adults were compared: the uncle preference rating given to this person when taking the role, the uncle preference rating given to this person when the child indicated his own preferences, and the similarity rating given to this person when the child rated perceived similarity to the role person. Beta weights revealed the extent to which each of the last two factors contributed to the first role-taking behaviour. On only six of the 32 analyses was a significant proportion of the variance accounted for in the regression.

In other words, the attitude and similarity factors taken together were not able to predict the role-taking behaviour very well. However, a frequency count was made of the number of analyses in which attitude contributed more than similarity and visa versa (frequency ratio will always be given as Attitude:Similarity). Placement of uncles for the liked English role was done more on the basis of attitude (5:3). Placement of uncles for the liked non-English and both disliked roles was done more on the basis of similarity (3:5, 2:6 and 3:5). Therefore, the children are more egocentric in applying their own preferences to others when the other is liked and speaks a similar language, but use their own judgments of similarity when taking the role of others who are disliked or speak a different language. These strategies resulted in accurate role taking in all cases. However, because the regressions explain only a small proportion of the variance and because the beta weights were so low, little confidence can be placed in these conclusions.

Discussion

These results quite clearly indicate that Indian children between the ages of six and ten are able to accurately adopt a different ethnic person's preferences for same-ethnicity uncles. In contrast to the findings with White American (Aboud & Mitchell, 1975), and British children (Middleton, Tajfel & Johnson, 1970), the Indian children were not impeded by negative affect from taking the role of a disliked group. Since it was possible that the Indians did not rate their disliked group as negatively as the White American children, these attitude scores were compared. The Indian children

in fact rated their disliked group peers more negatively ($\underline{M}$ = 42.11) than did the White children ($\underline{M}$ = 35.12).

A second possible explanation is that the Indian children were older on the average and so performed better. The mean age of the Indian children was approximately eight years; the mean age of first grade White American children was six years, and of the third grade White children was eight years. This age difference in the White children did not result in significantly different role taking scores. However, a separate analysis was run for the first grade Indian children (n = 16) whose mean age was 7.38 years. This analysis differed from the larger inclusive analysis in only one respect. In the disliked role, the preference for disliked ethnicity uncles was significantly greater than for liked and middle ethnicity uncles, but not greater than the preference for own ethnicity (Indian) uncles (Disliked $\underline{M}$ = 15.36, Own $\underline{M}$ = 22.34, Liked $\underline{M}$ = 29.41, Middle $\underline{M}$ = 30.91). These younger children were therefore somewhat more egocentric when negative affect interfered. This still compares favourably with the White children who did not distinguish between any of the minority ethnic uncles when taking the role of a disliked minority person (Middle $\underline{M}$ = 19.53, Disliked $\underline{M}$ = 20.26, Liked $\underline{M}$ = 21.64, Own $\underline{M}$ = 26.14).

Another interesting finding relates to the language variable. Whereas, White children were most confused when a role person from their own ethnic group spoke a non-English language, Indian children showed no such conflict. These Indian children all grew up with English as a mother tongue, but were aware of Indian languages spoken by older members of the community and learned at school. They had developed an understanding that language differ-

ences did not disrupt ethnic affiliations. For example, an Indian boy who spoke an Indian language was assumed to like Indian uncles ($\underline{M}$ = 12.06) as much as an Indian boy who spoke English ($\underline{M}$ = 12.42).

The present findings along with the earlier results suggest that the process of development of self-identification may indeed be an important factor in understanding other ethnic groups. The lack of significant interference of language differences or of negative affect led to better role taking in this group than in other groups tested. Although these children identified themselves as Indian (assumed on the basis of a label identification of grade one students tested eight months earlier and on the basis of their own preference for Indian uncles), the development of their identification was a complex and conflicting process. Evidence for this conflict comes from several sources. As mentioned previously, kindergarten children from the same school, tested eight months earlier, did not for the most part identify themselves as Indian. Secondly, when the present sample of children rated their attitude toward the four groups of ethnic boys, they indicated a greater preference for the liked ethnic group ($\underline{M}$ = 15.91) (15 of whom were White, 12 Chinese, and 5 Black) than for their own Indian ethnic group ($\underline{M}$ = 20.75). This suggests a more positive attitude (as friends rather than as kinship) toward peers from an ethnic group other than their own. And finally, these children have learned to incorporate into the Indian identity the use of both Indian languages and English. On this last point, a study of children attending school in their non-native language (Genesee, 1974) demonstrated that the conflicts generated by such a situation led to greater reciprocity in role taking. In conclusion, it would seem that,

though awareness of one's own ethnic identification may be crucial for an understanding of other ethnic affiliations, the nature of this identity development influences the extent of full reciprocity.

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Footnote

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TABLE 1

Mean placements of ethnic uncles for self and roles

(low score represents high desirability)

	Ethnicity of Uncle			
	Own	Most Liked	Middle Liked	Most Disliked
Self Preferences	12.61	26.64	33.53	38.38
Own ethnicity role	12.24	26.76	33.02	30.69
Most liked ethnicity role	26.66	10.85	30.98	32.36
Most disliked ethnicity role	24.32	29.06	32.98	13.41

Table 2

"Most Preferred" Ethnic Kin
(Canadian Indian children)

	Frequency of Kin Categorization		
	Correct	Egocentric	Incorrect
Liked English Role			
Grade 1	11	1	4
Grade 2 & 3	16	0	0
Liked non-English Role			
Grade 1	11	1	4
Grade 2 & 3	15	1	0
Disliked English Role			
Grade 1	12	2	2
Grade 2 & 3	12	3	1
Disliked non-English Role			
Grade 1	10	3	3
Grade 2 & 3	13	0	3
Totals			
Grade 1	44	7	13
Grade 2 & 3	56	4	4

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